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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series of teacher-written curriculum publications launched by the Bay Area Writing Project, each focusing on a different aspect of the teaching of composition. The booklet traces the growth of a reluctant writer through a semester of a remedial writing class program, using samples of the student's writing to illustrate writing improvement. Teaching methods described include well-structured writing assignments, peer writing groups, interaction with students during writing, and teacher writing to each assignment along with students. (AEA)

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Writing Class: Teacher and Students Writing Together

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   Explains the holistic procedures used in evaluating the writing samples, including student papers representing the range of student responses.

2. *Independent Study and Writing* by Sarah Dandridge, John Harter, Rob Kessler, Miles Myers, and Susan Thomas
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   Through the work of three beginning writers in a college writing center, Griffith describes the evolving relationship between fluency and shape, and fluency and correctness in writing.

10. *The Involuntary Conversion of a 727 or CRASH!: Some Ways and Means to Deflate the Inflated Style with a New Look at Orwell's "Politics and the English Language"* by Flossie Lewis
    Illustrates methods for teaching students to recognize dishonest language and to write honestly themselves.

11. *Writing Class: Teacher and Students Writing Together* by Dick Friss
    Friss traces the growth of a writer through a semester of his remedial "Writing Class," and shows how well-structured assignments, peer writing groups, and teacher writing can help the student writer gain skill and confidence.

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The Bay Area Writing Project is an effort by school teachers, college faculty, and curriculum specialists to improve the teaching of writing at all levels of education. The Project is funded by the CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK, the NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES, and the UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY. The findings of this study do not necessarily represent the views of the National Endowment for the Humanities or the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Individuals desiring information concerning The Bay Area Writing Project or the National Writing Project should write to Bay Area Writing Project, Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.

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Preface

Many students in many English classes, when given a writing assignment, will turn in for grading the first drafts they write. Some, having been told by their teachers that professional writers almost always revise what they have written, will copy their first drafts, making primarily cosmetic changes: writing with ink; eliminating scratch-outs, improving handwriting. Lacking a systematic process for revision, "copying it over in ink" is what many students think revision is.

In these pages Dick Friss takes us through a semester in his remedial "Writing Class," showing us the progress of Ken, a most reluctant writer, and revealing, through the progression of Ken's papers, the way in which he uses well-structured assignments, interaction with students during the writing, peer writing groups, and judicious teacher comments to lead students through several drafts to a finished paper. Friss also tells us why he decided to write to each assignment he gave the class and to join as a participant in the writing groups, thereby modelling the writing and revision process himself. Ken's obvious growth, both in writing skill and in self confidence, clearly reveals the success of Friss's techniques.

James Gray, *Director*
Bay Area Writing Project
School of Education
University of California, Berkeley

I wont out of this class, Becouse it is an A.B class and I belong in an C,B class, I am not planing on going to Callage Becouse it takes money and im not rich I might learn some thing in this class But ID rather ReAD more than I would wright in an english class.

This was my first introduction to Ken. I was teaching a new writing class for tenth graders who had done poorly in ninth grade English. I was not exactly warmed by Ken's first written statement but wrote on his paper, "If that is what you want, see your counselor and present the reasons you have written here. I'm sure something can be worked out." Little did I know that in the ensuing months, Ken and I would be working together with mutual eagerness, and that he would be a source, not only of challenge, but of inspiration that would last long after the semester course had ended.

Most of the students enrolled in "Writing Clinic AB" (or "Writing Class," the title I gave the course) had been recommended by their ninth grade English teachers the year before but, given the realities of our high school, there were also eleventh and twelfth graders in the class. Some of these had signed up to resolve schedule conflicts. They had needed an English class, and the period mine was offered had fit easily into their schedules. A few had wanted to have me for their teacher. Others had been left stranded without an English class at the end of registration and had been placed in my class by their counselor. The result of this "selection process" was a group of rather mixed abilities rather than a remedial class.

The modest goal for the course, set by the English department, was to help students having difficulty at the sentence level and, by the end of the semester course, to move them to proficiency at the paragraph level, so

that they might more easily succeed in the elective program for tenth through twelfth grades. These goals were also chosen to "protect" the integrity of the "Composition" classes where more ambitious objectives were entertained.

By the time the course began in the fall, it had taken on a new identity and new goals in my mind. These changes had come about largely because of my participation in the Open Program of the Bay Area Writing Project during the summer, an experience that caused me to have greater faith in what I felt to be valid about writing and the teaching of that process; and a teachers' strike with long hours on the picket line in which to sort out what really mattered in my life, particularly in the teaching of writing. It would further change as a result of my encounter with Ken and his classmates once the course had begun, expanding and crystallizing many of the practices I now take for granted in the teaching of writing in *all* classes.

As the course opened, my goal was to help students develop their own writing styles rather than imitate someone else's—their teacher's, Twain's, James's, etc. This did not mean total permissiveness or lack of guidance. To me, guidance means *drawing forth* rather than putting in. Another related goal was to help students say what *they* wanted to say for an audience beyond the teacher. The framework for the class became personal experience writing: students writing about themselves, their experiences, feelings, and *ideas*. I hoped that through this type of writing experience each student would come to see the value of his own personal experience and how it had contributed to making him who he was, and to see that the writing process, by taking subjective experience and objectifying it, would intensify this understanding. I also wanted them to arrive at answers to two important questions: What is writing? Why do we do it? I shakily promised myself to abandon anything that did not work and to be open to new ideas wherever they came from. The latter decision led to one of the most valuable experiences of my teaching career: using the teacher's writing process as a tool for teaching writing to students. The suggestion came from my students and grew out of our mutual frustrations along the way.

The school in which I taught, though located in what is loosely called "suburbia," was in reality much like an inner city school: downtown; working class, primarily, with the last remnants of solid middle class; a smattering of foreign students (Asian, Persian) and a few blacks. Total enrollment—about 2,000. My own classroom was often described as "weird" by students, for all available wall space was covered with posters; hand written quotes from literature, the arts, "Peanuts"; poems, including those of my students; objects created in the varied elective courses I taught—anything to stimulate thought and feeling and to celebrate the human condition. My favorite and most often quoted proverb was, "If you give a man a fish, he will have a single meal; if you teach him how to fish, he will eat forever."

Into this setting drifted Ken, a tall, lanky seventeen-year old, and his twenty-four classmates. After I had explained the course and its objectives, we began our first day, as we did every day thereafter, with journal entries. I asked the class to "fill up a page or two with whatever is on your mind today. Do not be concerned about form, spelling, etc., but be clear." Once this writing had been done, I asked the class to "select one idea out of what you have written and write about it in more detail." This was their first assignment. It was in response to these directions that Ken wrote his "I want out of this class" paper. As days passed, we brainstormed for ideas, childhood memories, specific topics; played with sentence combining; indulged in word associations and games that led to the generation of sentences and paragraphs; wrote daily journal entries: sometimes free-writing, sometimes on topics I suggested. Occasionally this writing was shared in groups of four students each. Sometimes what the group considered best was shared with the whole class.

We began our second major writing assignment by reading and discussing the material I had prepared on SHOWING AND NOT TELLING* in writing. Then the students started the written assignment.

Showing and not Telling in Writing

Telling:

> Each morning I ride the bus to school. I wait at the corner along with the other people who ride my bus. Sometimes the bus is late and we get angry. Some guys start fights and stuff just to have something to do. I'm always glad when the bus finally comes.
>
> —Seventh Grader

Showing:

> A bus arrived. It discharged its passengers, closed its doors with a hiss, and disappeared over the crest of a hill. Not one of the people waiting at the bus stop had attempted to board. One woman wore a sweater that was too small, a long loose skirt, white sweat socks, and house slippers. One man was in his undershirt. Another man wore shoes with the toes cut out, a soiled blue serge jacket and brown pants. There was something wrong with these people. They made faces. A mouth smiled at nothing, and unsmiled, smiled and unsmiled. A head shook in vehement denial. Most of them carried brown paper bags rolled tight against their stomachs.
>
> from *The Book of Daniel*
> by E. L. Doctorow

*This assignment was suggested by a presentation by Rebekah Caplan in the Bay Area Writing Project Open Program, summer, 1977.

Re: showing

1. What is the subject of each paragraph?
2. What words show something about the bus in paragraph two?
3. What do we learn about the people at the bus stop in the order they are presented?
4. What does "showing" do that "telling" does not?
5. What is the writer's attitude toward the people at the bus stop? How do you know? Cite evidence.

After discussing ditto on the above, write a paragraph that *shows* rather than one that merely tells. Begin with a simple statement you can expand through use of details and descriptive words. Develop it like the model from *The Book of Daniel.*

Suggested "openers" like "A bus arrived":

1. The bell rang. (a school situation)
2. The car came to a stop.
3. The teacher began to speak.
4. The cheerleaders exploded onto the field.
5. The door opened.
6. My dad began to frown.
7. The news came an hour ago.
8. I opened the letter.

During the beginning of the writing, I circulated about the room asking questions in response to those of the students, drawing them out, responding to "what do you think of this?" I found Ken stuck but smiling. In talking to him I discovered he had a wealth of ideas but couldn't get started. I later came to realize he felt he couldn't write (by which he meant spelling, grammar, syntax) and thus felt he *had* no ideas. By encouraging him to focus on what he wanted to say, supplying sufficient details so the reader could see and feel the experience as he did and forgetting about spelling, grammar, etc., I finally got him to try the assignment. A crucial part of this process, not only for Ken but all students, is the climate of mutual respect developed in the interchange.

The following is the process we used weekly for all major writing assignments:

Process Used in Writing Groups

A. Students write first draft of a given assignment.
B. Students proofread paper and copy onto ditto.
C. Papers are then run, a copy for each writing group member (4).

D. Students meet in writing group and, *one at a time,*
   1. hand out copies of their paper
   2. read paper to group
   3. receive comments and help from group members who:
      a. tell writer what they *liked* about the paper
      b. tell writer what he could do to make his writing clearer, more effective, more interesting.

   This process continues until all papers are read and commented upon.

E. Students rewrite papers, handing in dittoed draft with suggested changes and finished paper.

F. Teacher reads finished paper, comments and returns to student.

G. Student reads comments from teacher, shares with writing group and returns paper to teacher.* Papers are kept in student's file in classroom.

On the following pages is Ken's attempt at the previously described assignment developing the lead line: "The care came to a stop." The first version is his rough draft with changes and my comments. The second is his revision after meeting with his group and reading my comments.

*This step was not part of the original process but was added as a model for students' comments on papers being read.

The CAR CAME TO A STOP
The inside of the CAR WAS FILLED with
white smoke THAT HAD come from the tires when
the driver locked the BRAKES up AND sent
the CAR sliding AND SKIDDING DOWN the steep
Hill untill it CAme to rest At Bottom. Then
I noticed the man WHO WAS Driving, ~~he~~
seemed to have A half smile on his FACE, AS
if he HAD just head A funny Joke AND DIDN'T
laugh just SmileD. I STARTED to get out
when he STARTED up the Hill AS FAST or FASTER
than we CAME DOWN, you COULD HEAR the CAR
straining AS it went up the Hill, when we got
to the top he DIDN'T SAY A WORD he just
Drove on just like nothing ever HAPPENED

Ken:

I think your group should have given you some help with punctuation. Sentences begin with capital letters and end with periods.

11

The car came to a stop.
The inside of the car was filled
with white smoke that had come from
the tires when the driver locked
the brakes up and sent the car skidding
and sliding down the steep hill
until it came to rest at the bottom.
Then I noticed the man who was
driving, it seemed to have a half smile
on his face, as if he had just heard
a funny joke and didn't laugh just smiled
I started to get out when he started
up the hill as fast or faster than we
came down, you could hear the car
straining as it went up the hill, when
we got to the top he didn't say a
word he just drove on just like
nothing ever happened

Were you in the car? From your writing you didn't seem to be.

Use handwriting and observe rules for capitalization and punctuation.

What you have written about — a deranged driver — is interesting. You maintain a cool aloofness throughout the paragraph in spite of the weird scene. How you write it — punctuation? — is confusing.

After our first writing group discussions, I had students write in their journals what this experience was like for them. Here is such an entry from a girl who also had been a student of mine the previous year in ninth grade English:

> I survived the first week in your class. I must confess, I really feel I can be myself in here cause I love writing like this. Even though it might not be so hot "yet". Talking to everyone, as we did in our groups today, was really a feeling that's hard to describe. It made you feel as though you were the teacher. Helping everyone, and receiving advice that you need to help you do better. Everyone was honest towards each other. The working in groups, telling the stories we've composed and getting the advice from people our own age, helped me get over my problem of reading my works out loud (not entirely but it helped.) I hope when this semester is over, I will be doing my work the way you have wanted me to for over a year. Thank you for recommending me to this class. I felt at first, I was sorta dumb, cause I didn't get to choose the Eng. class I wanted (I was free to do so but I chose your recommendation because you have more knowledge on what's right for me.) But when I saw M. G---- and M. M---- (maybe others) I felt I was lucky. Thank you again, you don't know how I appreciate this.

Because of what I learned from reading the students' journals (each had an assigned day of the week to hand it in) and because of my new observations about the class, I made my first major departure from what had initially been outlined. First I requested students hand in their very first drafts in addition to the dittoed second draft and final draft. I wanted to get a larger picture of whatever changes occurred from first to last writing. Secondly, and I held my breath on this one, I told the class I would like to stop putting grades on their papers. Originally, each weekly writing assignment was to be graded. Quarter and semester grades were to be based on improvement and the number of completed assignments. We discussed my proposal. I wanted us to be free of grades. *I* wanted to be free of my anxiety in trying to assign an appropriate grade for improvement when the same paper in another class would earn a lower grade. I wanted my students to be free of anxiety about grades so they could concentrate on the writing process. The class agreed, and no paper ever received a grade again. As a result of the students' difficulty with our next assignment —write a short paper telling how you began doing something you customarily do—I introduced a third change. I did the assignment myself. In so doing, I saw where the difficulties were and thus prepared better directions. Little did I know this was to become a regular feature of the course. My paper and the new directions follow.

The Purple Pen

Some years ago, an enormous Huck Finn appeared in one of my Freshmen English classes. Despite his seeming attentiveness to everything other than what was going on in our class, he could verbally recount everything that had been discussed, responses to the topic and what the speaker was wearing. But when it came to writing, Chuck was a Mo-Ped in the Indianapolis 500.

We discussed this reluctance to deal with writing on many occasions. We even began writing back and forth in the margins of his "papers," sometimes leaving them looking like they had been removed from the flesh of the "illustrated man." This dialogue was long in getting started and came about by pure chance.

Apparently, on a series of papers, at a time when my comments were really being read, I had used a purple pen. Since our class wrote almost daily, there was much purple flowing forth until the day arrived when the pen dried up and I picked up whatever was handy.

The next day, when I returned the papers, Chuck, who made a great show of never reading my comments, said "Where's the purple pen? Why'd you switch?" I was stunned. He'd been reading my comments all along, perhaps even looking forward to them. That day after school I bought several purple pens and I have never used any other kind with student papers since.

J. R. Friss

Assignment: Write a short paper telling how you began doing something you customarily do.

Give some thought to something you do and how this practice originated.

Begin writing about how this activity or attitude originated. (See paragraphs one and two above.)

Then tell what the activity is and how you came to continue it. (See paragraphs three and four above.)

Choose some simple activity that has become a part of your life, something you are experienced with and have knowledge of. It need not be some earth-shaking activity that changed the world.

For some reason, Ken did not do what came to be known as the "Purple Pen" assignment, so his entry is not included here. There followed a two

week period wherein I felt I was spinning my wheels and getting nowhere or, at least, the class and I were not travelling with the momentum and enthusiasm previously established. I attributed this "stall" to a well motivated but poor decision on my part. I attempted to introduce literature into our writing class: Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. The class enjoyed my reading to them and our discussions, particularly about how Angelou wrote vividly of place and memories. Yet we seemed to get farther away from the quality of experience we had previously enjoyed. We had turned away from our lives and were now looking at that of another who seemed remote. I was unable to make the needed connections. With a sense of guilt, partly induced by the old admonition that literature and composition must be integrated and never taught separately, something I came to disagree with, I dropped the biography as part of our class work. Students continued to read on their own. I attempted to get us back on the road we had veered from: students writing from their own experience.

Since first quarter grades were on the horizon and because I wanted to know how *I* was doing, I had students begin writing what came to be known as the "letter to J.R." The directions follow. Before writing, we reviewed the course objectives, talked about my goals as well as any they may have set for themselves, and discussed the class procedures being used. I tried to get across the idea that this letter was not "just an assignment," but that I was really interested in what they had to say. I asked them to be very specific and, while they were writing this to me, also to keep in mind a larger audience of English teachers everywhere. Those instructions launched them into heated discussion that continued until the bell rang. As they walked out, I wondered how many would really write when the heat of the moment had died down.

> Given the goals listed for this class in the front of your folder, write me a letter—in your best writing form—telling me the following:
>
> 1. how am I doing as your writing teacher (include reasons why you feel this way);
> 2. what kind of assistance would you like that you are not getting;
> 3. what has been helpful so far in making you a better and/or more confident writer;
> 4. how do you now feel about your writing groups as a source of help
>   a) strengths
>   b) weaknesses
>   c) would you like to continue with the same group for the second quarter;

5. anything else you'd care to share at this time.

I would like your sincere comments in your best writing.

Ken chose to respond to this challenge. His letter signaled some departures from his earlier writing. It was more formal. He wrote to specific points relevant to himself. He ventured criticism of some of our practices but did so with a sense of humor. He was able to recognize the connection between frequent writing and improvement. He asserted himself, something new for him. Above all, he stated his ideas clearly. He had become involved.

Dear mr friss

you have stated in a ditto you handed out earlier this year that this class will help me improve my handwriting, vocabulary, spelling and so on. So far in my opinion, I have gotten better in all the feilds that you listed on the ditto and I think this shows how you are doing as my writing teacher.

I think I need some assistance in punctuation). I should be getting in in my writing group but Im not. I think its because we are all afraid to say some thing and there are no girls in my group and they almost always have some thing to say.

I think I am getting better and more confident in my writing because I am writing more so I ge' more practice.

As a source of help my writing group is dead. I think I would rather be in another group next quarter.

I am have some trouble in this class and it is making me work harder but I think I will (profit) for this experince as I get older

Yours truly

Kenneth

I read the letters with great enthusiasm and, because of them, made some changes in our class. The first was a modification of the writing group process (see pp. 4-5). After papers were read by me, they were returned to individual student writers who read them with my comments as before. But now these teacher evaluated papers were read by each member of the group. My reason for introducing this step was to permit students to see my response to their group members' papers and thus get a clearer idea of how they might have been helpful to each other at the revision and editing stages. The second change was in restructuring the writing groups. From the letters, I learned most students did not want to work in a group in which participation was low or non-existent. While I felt and stated to the class that even without a paper a student could learn from the process, they felt they, the writers, were being short-changed by not seeing writing from everyone and not getting as much help as possible. I decided to let them handle the problem as they chose. This meant that, generally, groups were formed on the basis of who had a paper. Ironically, this procedure got the non-writers writing more regularly. Ken moved to a group of better writers, another boy and two girls who "almost always (had) something to say." The third change in class procedure proved to be the most valuable of all and came from the students themselves. I was to do each assignment and join a writing group each week, handing out dittoed copies, reading my paper, receiving suggestions (they *did* come), and helping each member with revision. My participation included help with the thorny problem of how to give constructive criticism on a piece of writing while leaving the writer's dignity intact. I was also to move about from group to group each week. At this point, I became more involved in the writing process because I, too, now had a "real" audience: my students. The first week I joined a group, I noticed a definite lowering of the noise level around the room when I read my paper. Everyone wanted to hear what the teacher had written. To get around this disruption in the other groups' process, I promised I would read my paper to the class after group meetings but before the students' final editing. With this promise the room returned to its usual productive noise level and we were off once again.

The first assignment in which we all participated follows:

> The purpose of this piece of writing is to describe a room or place that is very familiar to you, one that is vivid in your memory.
>
> Your writing should *show* the reader, create a vivid picture in his mind by the clear way you use words. Your choice of words should not only cause your readers to *see* the room or place, but also they should feel what it is like to be there. You may also wish to use dialogue and typical action to bring the place into your readers' minds. Try to use some of the sentence combining skills

we have been practicing on worksheets. These skills should enable you to create sharp, vivid images.

Your audience is your writing group who has not seen the room or place you are writing about.

Try to write *at least* one highly descriptive paragraph of six to ten sentences. The number of sentences is not as important as is the clear, vivid picture you create.

To prepare for the assignment we brainstormed to discover various ways we might view the room and came up with this list:

room or place, ways to view

contents
architecture
effect of light and temperature
activities
time of day
people there (doing what?)
changes during day
purpose of room
feelings generated
changes in people
tempo of activities
who shares room
compare room to person, object
effect of time and activities
compare full to empty
conversations therein
general vs. detailed appearance

While students had been *hearing* my writing before—I had read my responses to various short assignments—with the exception of the "Purple Pen" paper, they had never seen it before. Below is my entry. I am writing from this room now.

My Study

Sunlight filters into the quiet room through a window overlooking a terraced garden in which tall trees stand guard at the highest point, providing privacy to the room within. Perpendicular to the window, a wall of books reaches from floor to ceiling, inviting one who stops here to explore the recorded endless journeys of the mind while sinking into the rust colored cushions of an ancient, friendly sofa, across the room, that has nourished young and old for almost a hundred years. Above this, on the wall, framed drawings mirror memories of forty years: a young man whose aristocratic head held high welcomes all challenges, confidently; a Miami debutante—clear eyed, full mouthed, regal; a large nude woman whose soft, brown, supple body caresses and envelopes the chair of which her body has taken possession; an abstract, elongated line drawing of two opposing groups, each accusing the other; a smaller frame almost exploding from the tension of the struggling figures locked within. Dominating the

room by its enormous size and central position, stands an elegantly carved, massive, walnut desk whose endless papers, books and organized clutter await the occupant's return from school. Near the door, on a small rush seated chair from Mexico, sits a papier mache, pig-tailed, little girl with freckles scattered across her face and flowing hands that dance stories only fathers of little girls are blessed to know and understand.

J. R. Friss

With this assignment, Ken began a series of papers written with sensitivity and vitality, and vivid in imagery. He was more open in class, actively seeking my help and that of other students. He became a respected member of the class and engaged in heated discussion, anxiously wrestling with the frustrations of writing which, I feel, he began to see as part of the writing process all writers engage in. He saw that those he had placed far above him as writers—his teacher, other students—also struggled. Included here are the dittoed paper he took to his writing group and his finished paper. Note the changes he has made in his "final" draft, changes made *after* I had read and evaluated his writing. This revision showed his degree of involvement and his recognition that a piece of writing is never really finished.

It was early morning. In the boat everybody seemed to be tense, afraid to relax, as the boat cuts through the water. Approaching the beach, something about it reminds me of a movie of people going to a deserted island [illegible].

When we landed, each of us started picking our inner tubes, fishing poles and went our seperate ways off into the island. The island seemed alive with all the rats + birds watching you walk down the path, as if they wanted to make sure you were no threat to them.

Nobody had seen anyone all day. As it started to get dark, One by one the people started to come back to the boat. You could sense there was a change in them. they were Loose, Laughing, and talking to each other. As we went back to the harbor they seemed to be thinking about the next week of work that would leave them frustrated and tense.

It was early morning. In the boat everybody seemed to be tense, afraid to relax, as the boat cuts through the water. Approaching the beach, something about it reminded me of a movie of people going to a deserted island. To die

When we landed, each of them started picking up our inner tubes and fishing poles and went their separate ways off into the island. The island seemed alive, with all the rats & birds watching you walk down the path, as if they wanted to make sure you were no threat to them.

Nobody had seen many one all day. As N started to get dark, one by one the people started to come back to the boat. You could sense there was a change in them. They were loose, laughing and talking to and at each other. As we went back to the harbor they seemed to be thinking about the next week of work that would leave them frustrated and tense.

Ken: This is your best writing so far — one of the best pieces in the class. It is alive with detail and worded so as to make the reader feel it. I hope your group enjoyed it as much as I.

(1.) Don't change tenses. You began with "seemed" — past tense — so keep it with "reminded."

(2.) Very effective sentence.

(3.) Are these two different groups of people? no

Beware of using capital letters in the middle of words and in the middle of sentences (unless these are proper names)

By our next assignment, it became apparent to the class that we had been engaged in a series of autobiographical pieces that ultimately would be a portrait of the writer. A plan began to take shape in my mind to find some way to supply each student with a book in which, near the end of the course, he would copy all his pieces, complete with title and table of contents. I did not tell them of this plan out of fear they would find it too formidable a task. Once again, they later proved my fears unfounded.

As in all assignments, we began the next with varied pre-writing activities that included sharing memories orally. This process looks like a gigantic bull session and probably appeared that way to some students but is an invaluable part of the writing process. Below is our next assignment and my response.

Write a paper telling about the first time you did something.*
Suggestions:

- the first time you thought you loved someone not in your family
- the first time you smoked a cigarette
- the first time you got in trouble with a teacher
- the first time you kissed someone who was not in your family
- the first time you drove a car or motorcycle
- the first time you got lost
- the first time you were away from home overnight
- the first time you won an argument with your mom or dad
- the first time you cut a class
- the first time you broke up with a girlfriend or boyfriend
- the first date
- the first day in a new neighborhood or city
- the first day in a new school

Your paper might include:

1. Introduction: background
2. People involved: what are they like?
3. Setting in which incident occurred, including feelings
4. The incident in detail
5. How it worked out in detail
6. Conclusion: what you learned from the experience that is still part of your life.

The First Time

Discipline. Most families are concerned with it but it is usually a one way street: whatever parents decide is the law. Thus, as a small child, it never occurred to me that it could be otherwise, at least in the early years.

*This assignment was suggested by a presentation by Gerry Camp in the Bay Area Writing Project Open Program, summer, 1977.

Mom was hopelessly Irish in temperament and personality, a strong, determined woman with a sense of humor who, at five feet, towered over my younger sister and me. She ruled us with a firm, loving hand. She was always right. Probably because she was often away working, she appeared to trust us a great deal, particularly when we were left alone from around age ten on. Like most children, on these occasions, my kid sister and I sometimes got into squabbles and I, being my mother's son, would attempt to settle the argument as she did, firmly and with a whack across my sister's butt with whatever was near. Once it was an umbrella.

My usual punishment for some infraction was a good licking across my backside with the firm, cold, ivory hairbrush, normally displayed in a prominent position along with other acouterments of beauty, atop my mother's dresser. After the incident with the umbrella one evening when mom was away at work, I knew the inevitable scene would occur the next day after my sister, Georgia, reported me for overstepping the limits of my self-proclaimed authority. The hours of terror I experienced from that evening until the next afternoon when I returned from school were rivaled only by the Inquisition. I had been wrong, I knew it. And I also knew I would be punished in the traditional manner. Still, it seemed unfair at age ten to be so demeaned.

After school the following day, the trial began. The plaintiff stated her charges. The judge made the usual inquiries to establish their validity. The defendant pleaded "guilty." The instrument of punishment was produced. The punishment carried out. But in the midst of it, full of indignation and relying on the advantage of finally towering a good inch over my mother, I swung round, grabbed the brush from her hand and laid a hard crack right across her ass. To this day I have never known what entered her mind at that precise moment, but I have never been struck by her since, nor have I ever used this form of punishment on my young daughter.

J. R. Friss

Ken continued his love affair with the water, using this new assignment to focus on another aspect. Following are his three drafts. The first is his very first attempt. He wanted me to read it before putting it on ditto. I did. We discussed the paper, made some changes, largely in spelling, tenses and sentence signals. Then follows his second draft with a few changes suggested by his writing group. Last is his final draft. Here notice greater control over language, tightness of expression, clear, vivid details, a new sophistication with language, but always the authentic voice: his.

It was the 4th of July and the man on the radio said it was going to be 105°. My dad came in and said we were going to go out in a boat on the river with his brother and his family. When we all got to the launching dock, there were too many of us to go to the beach at once, so we had to go in two trips. When we got to the beach some of us started fishing and some of us swimming.

my dad's brother started to talk about water skiing so I decided to give it a try, I got into the waters. they handed me the skis and the rope. they told me to put on the skis and hang on for dear life to the rope, and told me to holler when I was ready. The skis started to float as I got in deeper water. It seemed they had a mind of their own. they were floating every where except where I wanted them to. finally I half way mastered them and I said "go". Nothing happened. except I must have swallowed 5 gallons of water and inspected the river bottom personally. I don't try water skiing for a long time after that.

It was the 4th of July and the man on the radio said it was going to be 105°F. My DAD came in and said [illegible] going to go out in a boat on the river with his brother and his family." When we all got to the launching dock, there were to many of us to go to the beach at one time, so we had to make two trips. When we got to the beach some of us started fishing and some went swimming.

My ~~[illegible]~~ uncle brother started to talk about water skiing so I decided to give it a try. I got into the water. They handed me the skis and the rope and said to holler when I was ready. The skis started to float as I got in deeper water. It seemed they had a mind of there own. They were floating every where except where I wanted them to. Finally I half way mastered them and said "go". Nothing happened. I must have swallowed 5 gallons of water and inspected the river bottom personally. I didn't try to water skiing for a long time After that.

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My uncle started to talk about water skiing so I decided to give it a try. I got in to the water. They handed me the skis and the rope and told me to holler when I was ready. The skis started to float as I got in deeper water. It seemed they had a mind of their own. They were floating every where except where I wanted them to. Finally I half way mastered them and said "go". Nothing happend. I must have swallowed 5 gallons of river water and inspected the river bottom personally. I didn't try to water skiing for a long time after that.

This is a well written account of your first times on water skis. Clear, vivid details make the experience come alive for your readers.

(1.) Good detail

(2.) Nice short, blunt sentence coming after "go" is very effective.

When Thanksgiving week arrived, I had much to be thankful for. My enthusiastic students had enabled me to escape the demoralizing aftermath of the teachers' strike that had begun our school year, to replace those feelings of frustration my colleagues were still laboring under with excitement and a sense of accomplishment. Our class had taken on a school-wide identity as a place of work that somehow was fun. Visitors dropped in, particularly on days when writing groups met. On this three-day Thanksgiving week, Ken embarked on his most ambitious piece of writing in terms of effort, staying power, and sensitivity. He asked if he could change the assignment slightly. I agreed. I am still moved by this piece of writing a year later. In the following pages, notice that he has a first draft, a second draft, his ditto copy shared with his group, and his final paper with my comments. The directions given students for the assignment and my paper precede Ken's work.

Assignment

Write about an incident, using the vignette form:*

a) begin with a few lines of dialogue;
b) then explain what the dialogue is about;
c) then narrate (tell the incident working in more dialogue);
d) then give any analysis of your own that seems appropriate.

When you have finished your first draft, review the above to make sure your paper includes all the necessary information. You might care to begin by reviewing your lists of memories: 0-5 years; 5-10 years; 10-the present (in your journal).

*This assignment was suggested by a presentation by Tim Boorda in the Bay Area Writing Project Open Program, summer, 1977.

Rainy Day Reverie

"It's coming down in buckets!"

"Beat you to the porch!"

"Last one there's a sissy!"

Racing from the street to the protection of our wooden porch, sweating from the run and wet from the mid-western summer rain, we collapsed in rapturous giggles on the inside hall stairs, safe from the sudden downpour outside.

No matter where I've gone in all the years since then, the smell of cold, sudden rain sizzling on summer sidewalks takes me back to my childhood in St. Louis. Driven indoors from play by the fickle weather, my friend Tom, my sister Georgia, and I huddled together, laughing in the energy of love. I idolized Tom, so often in recycled army fatigues or T-shirt and worn jeans and, always, the battered hat, symbol of his freedom from convention.

How I had wished I could be like that, free of the past that always enveloped me, forcing me to be more correctly dressed, always color coordinated, neat and clean, fresh after hours of play: my armour that denied the pain that had begun when dad went away and my world fell apart. My creaseless clothes proclaimed a smoothly unruffled childhood. It would be years before I could relax enough to live in the moment, like Tom. At the time, it never occurred to me that he might have had his private disaster.

As I looked at her then, convulsed by the communion of laughter, Georgia appeared not to be my younger sister at all. Pigtails, once fresh strands of perfectly braided hair, now came out like porcupine quills in disarray. Escaped ringlets framed her smiling freckled face. Her clothes of many patterns, in comfortable conflict, ignored the adult-commanded dress code, mirroring eclectic childhood games where identities changed with the latest fantasies. A loving, wren-like girl, all soft and plump, she filled my heart with love.

I no longer remember how such days ended. It seems unimportant now. But what returns with the smell of cold rain sizzling on summer sidewalks, in any part of the world I happen to be, is the memory of friendship and love and the knowledge that these are ever present in all life's circumstances if we only choose to be.

J. R. Friss

1

Gregg you got a hit your pole

The place= a small boat in the middle of the river, resting behind a resting away moth balled ship. Three people fishing, to of them talking the third is reeling in and watching the poles. Then the tip of one of the poles goes wild. jerking [redacted] down and then relaxing and then down again. [redacted] the people [redacted] a person JUMPS up and grabs the pole and starts to set the hook. half way over his shoulder he is stopped in mid [redacted] swing. The pole is being bent by the weight of the fish as it runs. By this Time the other two people in the boat are standing on the seats and playing the fish in there minds as if they were fighting the fish. The [redacted] is screaming as the line is being pulled out of the spin finder reel he tightens down the drag to no avail as a last resorse he puts his thumb on the line and stops the fish and starts to reel the fish [redacted] The [redacted] is [redacted] the fisherman is winning At last over

[redacted] sea Then all of
sudden the fish breaks water in
a huge splash and starts to run
again but is stopped by the rip
of the pole, the fish and the fisherman
are exhausted from the fight as the
2 that were watching all the fish into
the boat the tired man settles
down with his pole [redacted] and
with his bare hand he pries his
hand off his pole His prize a
72 inch Sturgen the most ugliest and stron
fish in the river

+ + +

[redacted]

Hey You got a hit, your pole

A small boat in the middle of the river, resting behind a rusting away moth balled ship. Three people fishing, two of them talking, the third listening in and watching the poles. Then the tip of one of the poles goes wild, gesticking down and then relaxing and then down again. A person jumps up and grabs the pole and starts to set the hook, half way over his shoulder he is stop in mid swing as the fish starts to run. The drag is screeming as the line is being pulled out of the open faced reel over the boat pole and into the water, he trys to tighten down the drag to no avale as a last resourse he puts his thumb on line and stop the fish in its tracks. The Battle is all most over the fisherman is winning. As a last fighting chance the fish breaks water in a large splash and starts to run Again but is stoped by a wip of the pole, the fish is exhausted from the fight. By this time the other two people in the boat are standing on there seats and playing the fish in there minds as if they were fighting the fish. As the two that were watching pull the fish into the boat A tired man sets down with his pole in his hand and with his lose hand prys his fingers off the pole, his prize a 72 inch Sturgen the most ugliest fish and the strong

(pull the fish in)

Bite

[redacted]

Hey you got a strike, your pole

A small boat in the middle of the river, resting behind a rusting away moth balled ship. Three people fishing, two of them talking, the third listening in and watching the poles. Then the tip of one of the poles goes wild, jerking down and then relaxing and then down again. A person jumps up and grabs the pole and starts to set the hook, Half way over his shoulder he is stopped in mid swing as the fish starts to run. The drag is screaming as the line is being pulled out of the open faced reel over the bent pole and into the water. He trys to tighten down the drag to no avail. As a last resourse he puts his thumb on line and stop the fish in its tracks. The battle is all most over, the fisherman is winning, As a last fighting chance the fish breaks water in a large splash, and starts to run again but is stopped by a wip of the poles The fish is exhausted from the fight this time the other two people on the boat are standing on there seats and playing the fish in there arms as if they were fighting the fish As the two that were watching pull the fish into the boat A tired man sits down, with his pole in his hand and with his lose hand prys his fingers off the pole, His prize a 72 inch Sturgeon, the most ugly fish and the strongest fish in the river

"Hey, you got a bit." your pole? (1)

A small boat in the middle of the river, resting behind a rusting away mothballed ship. Three people are fishing, two of them talking, the third listening in and watching the poles. Then the tip of one of the poles goes wild, jerking down, and then relaxing and then down again. A person jumps up and grabs the pole and starts to set the hook. Half way (2) over his shoulder he is stopped in mid swing. As the fish starts to run. The drag is screeming as the line is being pulled out of the open faced reel over the boat pole and into the water. He tries to tighten down the drag to no avail. As a last resourse he puts his thumb on the line and stops the fish in mid stream. The battle is allmost over. The fisherman is winning. By this time the other two people in the boat are standing on their seats and playing the fish in their minds, as if they were fighting the fish. As a last fighting chance the fish breaks water in a large splash and starts to run again but is stopped by a whip of the pole. The fish is exhausted from the fight. As the two that were watching pull the fish into the boat a tired man seats down with his pole in his hand and with his free hand pryes his fingers off the pole. His prize: a 72 inch sturgen, the ugliest and strongest fish in the river.

Brest detail

(over)

Each time I go fishing out at the moth ball fleet, I remember that fishing trip and hope maybe this time it will be my turn to ~~have~~ catch a monster fish.

This is a very successful, exciting account of a particular kind of fishing. Some of the words are new to me so I'd like you to read it to me. I think you wrote for a fishing audience.

(1.) meaning is not clear here. [my] "Guess you've got a hit. Your pole!"

(2.) I have trouble picturing this as worded. The limitation may be mine. Perhaps you could explain it to me.

I really like this piece of writing. It reminds me of a big fisherman I've known: my dad. My daughter follows in his footsteps. My favorite picture of her was taken at dawn on Pinecrest Lake as she waited and waited for her first bite. She was ten years old. So your memory led me to two of mine. Thanks for the trip.

Heading into Christmas, we began our next major piece of writing. Because of its scope, I decided to write my paper ahead of time and present it to the class along with the directions for the assignment, a paper about someone who had influenced me. I found myself writing about an instructor in college, one of my most memorable teachers. I remember that when I finished reading the paper to the class, silence filled the room seeming to last forever. I had been so caught up in my reading and the flood of memories that tears were in my eyes. Such are the risks one takes. After a moment, someone asked, "Is that paper about you? I mean...are you the teacher? It sounds like our class." Until then I had not realized just how much Jack Sheedy *had* influenced me. Writing really *is* a process of discovery. Furthermore, when the teacher shares his writing with his students, they may lead him to discover even more than he was aware of.

Assignment

Write a short but detailed paper about one person or about a group of people who have influenced you.* Use incidents and typical conversation to make the person(s) you are writing about come alive for your readers. *Show* your readers; don't be satisfied just to tell them.

Suggestion: Intro-Background
Interaction with person
a) beginning
b) middle
c) end
Conclusion: Explain the person's influence on you.

*Remember how Angelou, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, writes about mother, Daddy Bailey, Bailey Jr. and Uncle Willy, using incidents and typical conversation to make them come alive.

Take Sheedy

I had saved a required course called "Principles of Literary Form" until my senior year in college. From friends on the faculty and fellow students I'd heard it was the hardest: the most demanding in thought, creativity and in the number of papers to be written. Looking through the college catalogue, I saw two names. One was that of an instructor I'd had for "Psychology in Literature" the year before. He was an easy-going man whose background in his subject matter was adequate, but I felt I had learned all I could from him. Besides, if I were in his class, I could predict in advance what each day would be like. What I really wanted was a challenge. The other name listed for the course I was about to take was "Sheedy." I'd never heard of him.

The unknown might be a challenge, but still I hesitated and asked around.

"Take Fineberg. It's an easy 'A' for you."

"What's to learn from him except where the best ski slopes and bunnies are?"

"Well, if you really want to work your ass off but learn from a fantastic teacher, take Sheedy."

"Sheedy? Are you kidding?"

"That guy thinks all we've got to do is write his papers. Besides, he's weird."

Well, I couldn't resist. I "took" Sheedy but by the end of the second-week I just like I'd been taken. I was snowed under with work and bombarded from all sides with ever changing ways of examining a piece of literature. The idea of symbolic structure in a poem, play or novel was difficult to perceive, something like a hologram. You could examine a segment of a good piece of writing and in its structure see the structure of the whole. Another weird thing about this man was that he required us to submit rough drafts of major papers two weeks before the final paper was due. It seemed like extra work. I later learned he did this so he could help us, that if we were taking an unfruitful direction, he could turn us around and we'd still have time to revise or begin anew. Even when my writing was not so hot—a "C" paper—he commented endlessly regarding what was good about it and made suggestions for improvement. Often I found myself up half the night, writing and rewriting, hating the extensive invasion of my already diminished time but loving those moments when I had succeeded, had surpassed myself in intellectual analysis and writing skill. Further evidence of his "weirdness" was that in an academic system where instructors had to have a Ph.D., he had only a master's degree. How'd he get away with it and be rehired each year? He was an extensively published writer! Learning this, my admiration soared. He was actually doing what he was trying to teach us: writing and succeeding.

By the end of the semester, after a months work of reading, research, conferences, writing and rewriting, I handed in a typed twenty-two page paper on the symbolic structure of Ibsen's ***Hedda Gabler.*** *This was my final piece of writing for the course. Into it I had put the best of my newly found abilities. I was satisfied that I had done my best but, more than that, I wanted it to be something Sheedy would like to read. The week that went by before the papers were returned was sheer hell. I tried to lose myself in work for other courses, but in the midst of this work I found myself wondering if Sheedy had read my paper. In class I tried to read some reaction in his face. Nothing. Then came the*

day when the papers were returned. With trepidation I opened the cover, saw a clean title page and began to read through. No comments. Then, at the bottom of the last page, in his usual precise handwriting, was one line: "an excellent job: this is, I believe, the best of the papers produced by the class."

In that one semester with Jack Sheedy, sixteen years ago, I learned that writing is a demanding mistress. Then, as now, he serves as a model writer and teacher. By his actions, he taught me that "if you're going to be a maverick in a conventional world, you'd better be damn good; then, and only then, will you be allowed to do what you do best." In working tirelessly and patiently with me, he gave me a part of myself I'd not known before: the writer. But above all, he led me to an understanding of symbolic structure in all of life, helping me to make sense of an often senseless universe.

J. R. Friss

Before presenting Ken's final piece of writing, I want to share a few additional details about our class. We did go on to create our individual autobiographies. With a friend's help, I acquired some blank booklets into which the students copied all their major pieces of writing. It was a formidable task and one that took almost two weeks in class. It was worth it. As each entry was carefully copied, further editing took place for this book was to be their best writing. In reviewing their work, the students saw their own growth as writers, some not believing just how much growth had taken place but being proud and eager to share. Many proverbs come to mind as I write this now—something like "Sweet are the uses of adversity," or "No growth without pain." However it is said, it was one of the best times of my teaching career.

And now Ken's final paper. Here you can see the emergence of a poetic quality that lay buried in his first "I want out of this class." Our working relationship during a few months of our lives calls to mind the motto that hung in our classroom:

If you give a man a fish,
he will have a single meal;
if you teach him how to fish,
he will eat forever.

She

warrior
warrior

She is vast at the End
and small at the beginning.
She can give life or take it in
an unmerciful way. She is a
warrior. She can be white & bubbly as
secrets and dark and calm in
others.

She first influenced me when
I was 10 years old. I was fishing
I was proud of the fish I had
caught and the skill I had caught
them with. I was relaxed when I
was with her. Later in the
years she satisfied my desire to show
my skill at water skiing and driving
boats. She was fun and satisfying to
my ego. She was the river

I am changed by these
experiences
come. I had something to work for at the
End of the week. On those Sundays
my family became a family. There was
no fighting. Just fun and relaxed
fun. I am still changing because of
her. She is part of my life - the river

She

She is vast at the end and small at the begining. She can give life of take it in an unmerciful way. She is a warrior. She can be while and bubbly and dark and calm in some places or neither.

She first influnced me when I was 10 years old. I was fishing. I was proud of the fish I had caught and the skill I had caught them with. I was relaxed when I was with her, later in the years she satified my desire to show my skill at water skiing and driving boats. She was fun and satisfying to my ego. She was the river

I am changed by these sure expirences, and will be by those that are there to come. I had something to look for at the end of the week. On these sundays my family became a family. There was no fighting, just fun and relaxation. I am still changing because of her, she is part of my life — the river

She

She is vast at the end and small at the begining. She can give life or take it in an unmerciful way. She is a warrior. She can be white and bubbly and dark and calm in some places or neither.

She first influenced me when I was 10 years old. I was fishing. I was proud of the fish I had caught and the skill I had caught them with. I was relaxed when I was with her. Later in the years she satisfied my desire to show my skill at water skiing and driving boats. She was fun to be with and satisfying to my ego. She was the river

Be definite about periods. Never confuse them with commas

I am changed by these experiences, and will be by those that are sure to come. I had something to look for at the end of the week. On these sundays my family became a family; there was no fighting, just fun and relaxation. I am still changing because of her, she is part of my life — the river.

Again, this is a beautiful piece of writing very much like a poem. I was glad Belich told you this also so you didn't think it was "just an English teacher's opinion" which often, to students, seems worthless or weird. A pleasure to read —

11

She

She is vast at the end and small at the beginning. She can give life or take it in an unmerciful way. She is a warrior. She can be white and bubbly and dark and calm in some places or neither.

She first influenced me when I was 10 years old. I was fishing. I was proud of the fish I had caught and the skill I had caught them with. I was relaxed when I was with her. Later in the years she satisfyed my desire to show my skill at water skiing and driving boats. She was fun to be with and satisfying to my ego. She was the river.

I am changed by these experiences, and will be by those that are sure to come. I had something to look for at the end of the week. On those sundays my family became a family, there was no fighting, just fun and relaxation. I am still changing because of her. She is part of my life—the river.

12